

University of Groningen

Over de incest. Een oriënterend onderzoek.

Kwast, Salomon van der

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1963

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kwast, S. V. D. (1963). *Over de incest. Een oriënterend onderzoek.* s.n.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

SUMMARY

This study aims at making a contribution to the problem of the development of sexual relations between members of the family-unit. In it has been included the essence of what has been published by different branches of science on incest and the incest taboo, and — using also a forensic-psychiatric investigation of 30 men-subjects detained on account of incestuous vice, devoting particular attention to the situational factors to be sought in the actual life of the family — an attempt made to integrate the various outlooks, and the conclusions of the investigation itself.

In order to avoid unnecessary complication of the problem, homosexual incest is left out of account. For practical reasons, the investigation was limited to cases of father-daughter incest.

In ethnological literature the taboo on sexual approaches between parents and children and between siblings is described as a universal limitation of the choice of partner. The extension of these taboos beyond the restricted family circle to include connection with other relatives however varies considerably from culture to culture. Often, moreover, they are accompanied by equally divergent regulations regarding preferential mating of certain other relatives (e.g. cross-cousin marriage, levirate etc.). It is evident that the kind of relationship is often more important than the propinquity, so that in many cultures on the one hand marriages are forbidden between persons between whom no demonstrable consanguinity exists, and on the other hand marriages are promoted which bring with them a very high degree of in-breeding.

Those who make themselves guilty of incest are usually severely punished and/or threatened with supernatural penalties, but in spite of this every society has its own sensational breaches of the incest taboo. Approved incestuous relationships are always confined to exceptional circumstances or to privileged people, and never the result of primitiveness.

In the second chapter a survey is given of the most important ethnological theories concerning the incest taboo. The so-called historical theories have as their common shortcoming that scientific verification is excluded, because they see the origin of the taboo in the primeval age of mankind. In fact they reduce the significance of the taboo accordingly to an atavism, which only by the grace of tradition, or the hereditary anchoring of certain human experiences in a 'Massenpsyche', has continued in existence, and has little or no further present-day reason for existence.

The conception of Westermarck posits that the incest prohibition is the expression of an aversion to incest which, in its turn, is connected with sexual indifference, arising from the influence of daily family life. Though this latter opinion finds some degree of support in the observations of psychology and animal-psychology, Westermarck was not able to make acceptable the genesis of aversion, from this indifference. It is his unmistakable merit that he, in contrast to the majority of his colleagues, regards the emotional loading of the taboo as requiring just as much explanation as the prohibition itself.

The strongly psychological-slanted theories of Malinowsky, Seligman, etc., posit that a sexual relationship between parent and child is incompatible with his authority over the child, and that incest might be a source of conflicts that would seriously threaten the stability of the family. Both the one and the other sound, to a certain extent, plausible, but require closer working out to be wholly convincing.

The sociological theories of Fortune, White, Schelsky etc. see in the incest taboo primarily a measure which aims at promoting cohesion and co-operation in society as a whole. Through exogamous marriage, alliances arise between different groups, which without it would lead an isolated existence. Lévi-Strauss saw in exogamous marriage rather an expression of already existing relations between groups. Especially the first-named appear to underestimate the significance of other forms of social organisation (associations) and to overestimate those of the organisation of society on the basis of family relationship.

The criminological and forensic-psychiatric literature referred to in the third chapter clearly reflects the development which these branches of science have manifested in the last 50 years. The stress which, in the literature which appeared between the two world wars, was placed mainly on factors like bad housing, enforced sexual abstinence, moral depravity, oligophrenia, alcoholism and hyper-sexuality, has shifted gradually to the more psycho-dynamic and socio-psychological aspects of incest. A noteworthy shortcoming of most publications was,

that insufficient account was taken of factors which make the material collected anything but representative.

While incest was formerly often described as a phenomenon intimately bound up with social degeneration, in some more recent publications this is given much less attention, and sometimes it is in fact observed that the social adjustment of the incest-criminal can be fairly good. In psychiatric investigation, almost all the authors had established evident psychopathological deviations from the normal in the majority of men examined by them. Psychotic pictures and dementias were fairly seldom manifested. Certain selective factors probably account for the fact that in the older publications oligophrenia was strongly represented; but probably with the help of modern aids to diagnosis a number of cases than regarded as defective would now be classed as pseudo-feable-mindedness. However, unchanged remains the picture of the incest-criminal as a tyrannical and egocentric man; but in contrast to previously, modern authors more frequently recognize in this the facade of the infantile, poorly-integrated, inadequate-feeling, anxiety-filled personality.

In the fourth chapter, the theory of Freud about the Oedipal phase in the development of the young child is broadly outlined. The awakening sexuality of the child in its first years is directed at the persons in its immediate environment, with whom already strong bonds of affection exist. The first choice of partner is therefore an incestuous one, and because of the child's desire to possess its mother or father wholly for itself feelings arise of enmity towards the other parent. Through the projection of its own aggressive feelings, and because of real threats as a result of infantile masturbation, arise the so-called castration anxiety, which, together with the inevitable frustration of the Oedipal desires, the fear of losing the love of the parent of the same sex, and the so-called latent period, the child is forced to give up his incestuous desires, by repressing them, and/or directing them at other persons. The resolving of the Oedipal choice of partner is accompanied by an identification with the father, by which the boy makes the other's rejection of the Oedipal choice his own; and thus is born the aversion to incest, as the individual barrier to the return of the incest-impulse.

Many authors have raised objections to this psychoanalytic conception. The general tendency is to lay more stress on cultural aspects (the shut-in-ness of the family circle, the attitude towards infantile sexuality) and neurosis-producing moments in the family life. In proportion as the Oedipal phase tends less to be seen as an inevitable development or even as a symptom of a neurotic conflict,

these theories lose their value as an explanation of the aversion to incest as a universal phenomenon.

Psychoanalytical publications devoted to the actual sexual contact between father and daughter are rare. From this literature it is, however, plain that serious doubt exists whether the daughter-participant is led into it through persistent or reactivated Oedipal desires. Instead it seems as if it must be attributed to other impulses, including the vicarious satisfying of the affective desires frustrated by the mother, and/or aggression directed at her.

In summing up and discussing the findings of the author's own material in chapter 5 many aspects of the incest-criminal came under consideration, as well of his family and the beginning and development of the incestuous relationship. As a rule, the man appeared to be a definitely mentally-disturbed, more or less so-called 'psychopathic', personality. Significant alterations in intelligence, or dementias, were, like alcoholism, only sporadically manifested, and had, for the beginning of the incest, hardly any significance. Most usually the man was characterized by a strong need to assert himself, a slight frustration-tolerance, and a tendency to aggressive reactions or subjection to moodiness. Behind the facade were often concealed strong feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and anxiety. Only in a minority of cases the incest was an isolated symptom; usually there had already existed for a longer period manifest and sometimes serious sexual disturbances of another kind. Most commonly the man had grown up in a family which could only be described as unfavourable as an upbringing-milieu; and for this reason, and the absence of convincing indications of a constitutional basis of the psychiatric picture, it was in nearly all cases necessary to speak of a preponderantly neurotic character-distortion.

The wife of the incest-criminal was as a rule mentally little less disturbed than her husband. Their marriage had often come to such a pass that it offered little hope for the future. Often their pathological interaction had got stuck fast in a vicious circle. Yet in spite of this, their marriage was characterized by a certain stability, because of their mutual affective dependence.

In the attitude to his children, there was present a strong urge to bind them to him, and to curtail their independence. This repeatedly led to very serious conflicts with the older children. In other aspects of the family life, too, the behaviour of the man was characterized by the tendency to dictate the course of affairs and to tolerate no other authority about him than his own.

Through his attitude to his children, and often very serious marital

discord, the family had frequently fallen out into two groups, and an exclusive relationship began between father and daughter. This relationship was promoted by the often unsatisfactory relationship between mother and daughter. In many cases the incest had an insidious beginning, and was preceded sometimes by a certain pseudo free-and-easiness in the family life. Where the incest lasted rather longer there were, as far as concerns the girl's attitude, sometimes three phases distinguishable, vaguely bordering on each other. After a period of compliance there followed a stage of more active participation, which in turn gave place to a stage during which her growing resistance came to the fore. In most cases serious coercion or intimidation were not present, and the attitude of the girl towards the incest was at first primarily determined by her affective bond with the father, together with an emotionally frustrating mother-daughter relationship.

In some cases the attitude of the wife to the incestuous approach between father and daughter did not seem entirely devoid of a certain sexual (triolistic) satisfaction, but probably her own affective link with the husband played the greatest role in her apparent tolerance.

The sixth chapter is devoted to some epicritical remarks on aversion to incest and the beginning of the actual incestuous approach. Aversion to incest is described as an attitude in the parent-child relationship not simply to be put down to the socialization of the individual, but also to be regarded as a barrier between parent and child induced by the concrete situation in the family life. Fundamentally the sexual contact between them (among other things by reason of the fact that according moral custom sexuality has to be expressed in the frame of an enduring relationship) is incompatible with the position of mentor and pupil towards one another, with the consciousness of the difference in generation, and with the group-dynamic stability of the family. The undermining of the parental authority by the incest seems especially to be attributable to the negative component in the attitude towards sexuality. The threat to the stability of the family through sexual rivalry seems to be less important than the direct threat by the incest to the intrinsic value of the mother-daughter relationship itself. Looked at from these points of view, not only the incest but also the aversion to incest is a 'three-way process'.

Father-daughter incest is described as a multiconditional and highly dynamic occurrence, which in its course of development (by reason also of the fact that it is a process which itself undermines the conditions for its own beginning) is apt to be especially complicated. The

most important situative component is seen in the constellation of the ambivalent affective relationships within the family (to the causation of which the husband naturally makes his own contribution), and its effect can probably best be designated as a facilitating one. The from the man's point of view so frustrating married life, the unsatisfactory mother-daughter relationship, or other factors which lead to an affective isolation of the girl (who already from other causes is restricted in her possibilities of adequate reacting) plus the constraint of the wife that is rooted in her own emotional plight, are the most frequently met with elements in the environment in which the incest is to develop. The man's sexual preoccupation, the way in which he behaves as father, his xenophobically limited world, and his tendency to inadequate forms of reaction seem to be the principal individual determinants of his behaviour. In the conjunct of these factors that result in the incestuous relation, the words 'perpetrator' and 'victim' do not seem appropriate for a satisfactory description of the role of the persons who are directly involved in it.

In regard to treatment, it must be remarked that one must take into account the fact that the incest can in part arise through the pathological interaction in the family, and that not only the fact of being affected by the incest itself, but also the denunciation to the police and the arrest of the man bring with them, for everyone but especially for the daughter, serious psychological conflicts; and that the both primarily and secondarily disturbed mother-daughter relationship usually makes urgent psychotherapeutic assistance necessary. In connection with this, a plea is made that the care given to the man should be supplemented by treatment aimed at the interaction of the family as a whole.